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Committee for Programme and Coordination
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Agenda item 9
Adoption of the report of the Committee on its forty-first session

Rapporteur: Mr. Ayman M. **Elgammal** (Egypt)

Addendum

Programme questions: proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003

(Item 4 (a))

Section 26. Public Information

1. At its 28th and 29th meetings, on 28 and 29 June 2001, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered section 26, Public information, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003.

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced section 26 and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the budget section.

Discussion

3. Support was expressed for the activities carried out by Department of Public Information. The role of the Department in increasing the awareness and understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among peoples of the world remains important for successful implementation of the themes and issues of the United Nations.

4. Satisfaction was expressed with the utilization by the Department of Public Information of digital technology, computerization and the Internet. It was further expressed that while the use of electronic media was increasing, the more traditional means for the dissemination of information should continue to be used in view of the technological gap between Member States. The view was also expressed that

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radio remains one of the most cost effective and far-reaching traditional media available for the promotion of the activities of the United Nations around the world.

5. Noting that the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations had been successfully carried out, the view was expressed that the transition to permanent implementation of the project to more radio stations around the world should be supported.

6. Concern was expressed regarding the unequal treatment of the six official languages on the United Nations web site, particularly in Chinese, Russian and Arabic. A similar view was expressed on United Nations publications, press releases and Library services. The need for equal treatment of all six official languages was emphasised, while, at the same time, it was noted that the demand for and use of the English Language site was overwhelming. It was pointed out that the use of non-official languages in the United Nations Radio must be strengthened in order to reach the largest audience worldwide. In this regard, it was pointed out that any activities dealing with non-official languages should be funded through extrabudgetary resources.

7. Views were expressed that the proposed outputs were too numerous and similar in nature, particularly those in subprogrammes 1 and 2. It was also noted that outputs tend to remain unchanged over the years. Concerns were expressed regarding the non-availability of information on the target audiences of various outputs produced by the Department, their level of satisfaction, and the usefulness and impacts of the outputs. Views were also expressed regarding the prioritization and streamlining of the Department's activities and services. In this regard, the importance of self-evaluation was also noted, especially utilization of the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System to evaluate the Department's outputs and activities for relevance and effectiveness.

8. Concerns were expressed regarding the level of integration of public information services and activities among New York, Geneva and Vienna, and the level of coordination with other entities in the United Nations system, both at Headquarters and in the field, in order to avoid duplication of activities and services and increase the efficiency of public information activities.

9. Views were expressed that while the United Nations information centres provide effective and localized information services in the field, the cost for these services was high. Suggestions were made to review and rationalize the existing information centres to see if cost-saving measures could be adopted by terminating some centres located in developed countries, relocating some centres to United Nations Houses, and adopting improved coordination strategies, including with other United Nations system offices.

10. Suggestions were made that the Department of Public Information prepare a report on the cost-savings to the information centres and to the Department as a whole resulting from the on-line availability of documents and publications.

11. Views were expressed that the Secretary-General should examine alternative ways for the Department of Public Information to carry out its mandates and responsibilities more efficiently and effectively, in particular in the light of available technology and changing needs, and report thereon at the first part of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

Conclusions and recommendations

12. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the programme narrative of section 26, Public information, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003.

13. The Committee also recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to report on the impact of the "United Nations Houses" initiative on the operations, budget and staff of the information centres, taking into account the views of hosting countries.

14. The Committee further recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to report on the impact of the depository libraries as well as the upgrading of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library's integrated management system on programme delivery.

15. The Committee further recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on the simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages on the United Nations web site.

16. The Committee recommended to the General Assembly, during its consideration of section 26 of the proposed programme budget, to pay special attention to the programme aspects of developing and enhancing the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization, due to the goal of achieving full parity among the United Nations official languages on the United Nations web site.